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SUBJECT: BORDER GOVERNORS SEEK TO INCREASE REGIONAL INTEGRATION

REF: MONTERREY 297

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. On September 2-4, the annual Border Governors Conference took place in Monterrey. The event, hosted by Nuevo Leon Governor Gonzalez Paras, featured participation from New Mexico Governor Richardson, California Governor Schwarzenegger (via DVC), Ambassador Pascual, DHS Border Czar Bersin, and ONDCP Director Kerlikowske, Foreign Minister Espinoza, Mexican Ambassador Sarukhan, and the Mexican Governors of Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas. Conference discussions focused on economic, environmental, and infrastructure issues facing all ten border states. The highlight of the event was the approval of a Strategic Master Plan for Competitive and Sustainable Development drawn up by the Woodrow Wilson Center and Mexico's Colegio de la Frontera Norte. In addition, conference delegations approved a resolution, supported by the U.S. NGO Culture of Lawfulness (an INL grantee), calling for a border-wide approach to rule of law projects. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Border Governor's Conference (BGC) is a bi-national venue dedicated to the discussion and resolution of border issues that impact the U.S. and Mexico. The first conference was convened in Juarez, Chihuahua in 1980 and since then a conference has taken place nearly every year. At conference sessions, worktables bring together experts to study problems and make recommendations for such issues as the environment, education, logistics, trade, energy, agriculture, economic development, security, health, and water. In addition, the Governors themselves meet in executive sessions to discuss these same topics. To avoid distraction and controversy, Nuevo Leon organizers explicitly did not include an agenda item dealing with 'the border', as the border itself was not a geopolitical entity.

¶3. (SBU) While the conference focus is on state governments, USG agencies attending this year's September 2-4 conference in Monterrey included State, DoD (Northcom), DHS -- CBP, DHS -- ICE, ONDCP, USDA, DHS, GSA, and FEMA. Mexican federal agencies represented included SRE, the Secretariat of Communications and Transportation (SCT), the National Council on Science and Technology (CONACYT), the Secretariat of Gobernacion (SEGOB), the National Water Commission (CONAGUA), the Secretariat of Energy, and the Secretariat of Health. Indeed, USG participants outnumbered all the individual U.S. state government participants combined, as the Governors of Texas, California, and Arizona did not appear in person, with the last two cancelling their participation at the last minute.

¶4. (SBU) The Conference Chair -- Nuevo Leon Governor Jose Natividad Gonzalez Paras -- actively sought input and participation from U.S. federal government attendees,

particularly with respect to various projects (dealing with logistics and border crossings, science and technology, tourism, security, emergency and civil protection, water, energy, the environment, and health) which fell under U.S. and Mexican federal jurisdiction. For instance, the state of Nuevo Leon sought to gain support for strategic development of its Colombia crossing once the USG approved Webb County, Texas's application for a international rail bridge permit.

15. (SBU) Pursuant to Conference procedures, each country's state co-chair, i.e., for 2009 the state of Nuevo Leon and the state of Arizona, was to have distributed a list and description of these projects to its national government for interagency review. The state of Arizona, however, did not do this prior to the Monterrey meeting. After the conference, ConOff proposed to Nuevo Leon state organizers that each country's co-chair distribute relevant Conference work documents to the nearest U.S. Consulate, which could then forward items to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City and to Washington. While Nuevo Leon concurred with this approach, in order for it to carry forward Baja California, the next Mexican co-chair, would need to agree to the same.

16. (SBU) In his intervention, the Ambassador proposed that, in conjunction with the Mexican Ambassador to the United States, he organize a workshop in Mexico City to discuss with GOM officials how to advance action on the Indicative Plan. (A similar session was held in Mexico City during spring 2008 but with Mexican federal government leaders.)

17. (SBU) The key achievement of the September 2-4 session was the adoption of the Strategic Master Plan for Competitive and Sustainable Development drawn up by the Woodrow Wilson Center and Mexico's Colegio de la Frontera Norte. In addition, conference delegations approved a resolution, supported by the U.S. NGO Culture of Lawfulness (an INL grantee), calling for a border-wide approach to rule of law projects.

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18. (SBU) Comment. Given the USG's comprehensive approach to U.S.-Mexico relations, greater attention will need to be paid to the Border Governor's Conference. The sheer grass-roots, political energy represented at the state level constitutes a tremendous resource that cannot, and should not, be wasted. In addition, leveraging state government efforts will help Washington and Mexico City create the infrastructure and doing business environment necessary to generated increased economic opportunity and growth in both countries. With the next full meeting set for summer 2009 in Arizona and the call by governors for greater federal participation in relevant border issues, a larger USG focus on Border Governor's Conference proceedings could be a key element in moving forward constructive conference proposals in a wide variety of areas.

19. (U) The Ambassador has cleared the text of this cable.  
WILLIAMSON